



The GSChronicles

July 2009

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Upcoming Events

August

- 3 GSC Meeting, GSC Lounge, 4PM
- 4 Manna Food Packing, 6:30PM
- 4 "Writing a Thesis Proposal" Workshop, 3:30PM
- 4 Grad Student Orientation, 8:30-10AM
- 5 Annual Grad Student BBQ, 12-2PM
- 7 Overseas Security Training, 8AM
- 20 GS3, Topics in Gene Expression, 1PM
- 28 Individual Partnership Lunch, 12:30PM

September

- 7 Labor Day
- 14 GSC Meeting, Bldg 50 Rm 1328, 4PM
- 17 GS3, Topics in Neuroscience, 1PM

Announcements

■ GSC Meeting:

The next Graduate Student Council meeting is on **August 3rd** at **4pm** in the **Graduate Student Lounge**, Bldg 10 Room 6S235A. Videoconferencing is **not** available for the August meeting. All graduate students are invited.

■ GSC Open Positions:

Volunteers are needed for a number of open GSC positions on the **Social, Career Development, Teaching, and Thesis** Committees. A few positions for US **Individual and International Partnership Representatives** are also open. Please contact GSCcochair@od.nih.gov for more details.

■ Community Service:

The next service event at Manna food warehouse is **August 4th**. This is a fun way to give back to our local community and meet some friendly grad students! We meet at **6:30PM** in front of Bldg 2 to carpool. Contact GSCservice@od.nih.gov to sign up.

■ GPP Lunch Barbecue:

The BBQ will be held on the lawn in front of Building 1, **12-2PM** on **August 5th**. All graduate students in individual and institutional partnerships, partnership directors, training directors, mentors, and NIH investigators are welcome to attend. Come meet new graduate students, learn about GPP resources for graduate students, and enjoy lunch on the lawn of Building 1. If you haven't already, PLEASE RSVP today: <http://tinyurl.com/OITE-2009-08-05>.

■ Overseas Security Training:

There will be a mandatory overseas security training workshop on **August 7th** from **8:00AM-1:00PM** in Room 1227 of Building 50, for students who will be going abroad to study. If you are a GPP graduate student who will be studying internationally, whether in a formal (Oxford/Cambridge or Karolinska) or individual agreement partnership, you must take this training. To receive the certification you must attend the whole training, so plan accordingly. To reserve a seat please contact Shawn Mullen at mullensh@mail.nih.gov.

■ GS3:

The **Graduate Student Seminar Series (GS3)** is a monthly meeting where students present their work to fellow graduate students. The GS3 Committee is now scheduling speakers for the Fall 2009 Graduate Student Seminar Series. Just fill out the GS3 Entry Form at <http://gpp.nih.gov/NR/rdonlyres/82279534-3D48-4AD4-9D53-01F61A638353/19603/GS3FormatForm.doc> and submit it to GSCgs3@od.nih.gov to be considered for this unique seminar series!

■ Thesis Committee:

Graduate students present their dissertation research to the NIH community. This thesis seminar is an opportunity to celebrate with colleagues who contributed to the student's achievement and to introduce the student and his/her work to other scientists with similar research interests. To schedule a defense at NIH, contact GSCthesis@od.nih.gov, or see: <http://gpp.nih.gov/Current/GraduateStudentCouncil/GSCCommittees/Thesis+Talks+Committee.htm>.

▪ **Dissertation Discussion Group:**

Are you in the process of writing your dissertation? Let's get together as a group, led by Dr. Betsey Wagener, to discuss your progress, writer's block struggles, and tips for other students! All levels of dissertation writing and all fields are welcome. Meetings are every other Tuesday, 12-1PM, Bldg 2, Room 2W15 (2nd Floor Conference Room). Please register in advance at:

<http://www.training.nih.gov/nihonly/register/dissertation-discussion-group.asp>.

▪ **GSX Listserv:**

The Graduate Student Exchange (GSX) is a social listserv for grad students at NIH. Postings for roommates, items for sale, and social outings are common. It's a great way to connect to fellow grad students. To join the group, visit: <http://gpp.nih.gov/Current/GraduateStudentCouncil/GSCListSers/>.

▪ **SNIG:**

The **Systems Neuroscience Interest Group for Graduate Students** is a group of students interested in systems/ cognitive/ clinical neuroscience. To learn more about SNIG, visit: <http://gpp.nih.gov/Current/GraduateStudentCouncil/GSCCommittees/Academic.htm#SNIG>. If you are interested in joining SNIG or have questions, please email GSCsnig@od.nih.gov.

Happy Birthday to: Mariel Figuerua (July 4th), Andrius Masedunskas (July 8th), Fatima Nawaz (July 11th), Susan Shao (July 14th), Chris Greil (July 14th), Alexandria Bortnick (July 19th), Lauren Skeffington (July 20th), Pavitra Kannan (July 21st), Deborah Kwon (July 27th).

Upcoming Birthdays: Molly Bright (August 1st), Ting Tang (August 2nd), Claire Shaler (August 7th), Gulcin Pekkurnaz (August 9th), Erica Jones (August 14th), Muslimah'Ali Najee-ullah (August 14th), Rui Gao (August 15th), Giovanna Jaramillo-Gutierrez (August 22nd), Elizabeth Mayne (August 27th), Lindsay Hayes (August 30th)



Congratulations to **Christina Bodner** on successfully defending her thesis! Chris was in the Laboratory of Chemical Physics, NIDDK/NIH (Dr. Ad Bax) and the Chemistry Department at Cambridge (Prof. Chris Dobson).



Congratulations to **Stephanie Guzik** on her recent engagement!



Congratulations to **Megan Dennis** for her successful thesis defense! Megan was a student in NHGRI (Dr. Eric Green) and at the Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics at Oxford (Dr. Anthony Monaco).

Please **send your publications, awards, graduation, and birthday announcements** to GSChronicles@od.nih.gov for recognition.

Graduate Student Spotlight



Vania Cao

Vania hails from the city of State College, PA, home of The Pennsylvania State University main campus, which was actually just voted the #1 party university in the country. Penn State students comprise much of the population, as the city becomes a ghost town during the summer months. It's a quiet, peaceful place that holds a big annual Arts Festival, has fantastic 4th of July fireworks displays and a killer Creamery, courtesy of the university.

Vania, and about 70% of her high school class, stayed close to home to attend Penn State. Vania majored in Microbiology and worked on a protein kinetics research project in the lab of Dr. Steven Benkovic, studying the reaction dynamics of the protein dihydrofolate reductase.

Studying science was not a difficult choice for Vania - it always seemed to have the answers to everything she was curious about during her youth. As both of her parents were involved with scientific endeavors, she spent a good portion of

her childhood wandering around the laboratories where they worked. These experiences, as well as her personal interest in behavior and disease, pointed her towards a scientific path.

Vania is currently in the Brown University-NIH GPP and works on a joint project between the laboratories of Kuan H. Wang (NIMH) and Rui M. Costa (NIAAA). In her third year, she tracks cortical plasticity with *in vivo* imaging and electrode array recordings in mice. She aims to identify neural ensembles and study their dynamics over different behavioral experiences.

In addition to her research, Vania works as an Assistant Editor with the GSChronicles. She also enjoys amateur digital painting, drawing and occasionally music composition. A self-proclaimed amateur at organized sports, she still loves being active outdoors. *House MD* and *Mythbusters* are among her favorite TV series, and she enjoys the *Agent Pendergast* and *Repairman Jack* book series. Vania grew up with mostly rodent pets, but she is currently long-term fostering a cat, and recently inherited a leopard gecko from a friend.

When asked to recall her most embarrassing moment, Vania produced a story to which most graduate students can relate. Earlier this year, she stumbled into lab in the wee hours of the morning to start an experiment in order to fit it into the booked schedule of the lab scope, only to find she couldn't get a clear image from the machine. She then proceeded to email the entire lab about the equipment being out of order and then went home reasonably upset, only to return about five minutes later once she realized she had forgotten to conduct the most basic alignment step. It's along the lines of forgetting to open the shutter on a camera and getting worked up over not being able to see anything. She has coined this condition 'Scope Stupidity', and fears she is far from finding a cure.

However, as she recalls the words of the band Linkin Park, "The journey is more important than the end or the start...in the end, it doesn't even matter." To some it may sound like a defeatist statement, but to Vania, it means that we all need to remember every now and again that although a long-term goal and dream is certainly worth striving for, we shouldn't forget to enjoy the present. She remarks, "In the end, it's our unique journeys towards our goals, and the lives we touch on the way, that make life worth living."

GPP Retreat Summary

Guest Writer: Stephanie Guzik

The sixth annual GPP Retreat was held July 16-17, 2009 at the Rocky Gap Resort in Flintstone, MD. Over 80 students from NIH main campus and several satellite campuses attended this year's retreat for two days of science, community building, and leadership workshops.

The planning committee (Heather Huson, Candace Pfefferkorn, Micah Webster, and Stephanie Guzik) put together a full schedule, entitled "Leadership in Life and in the Lab," which featured guest speaker Hile Rutledge from Otto Kroeger Associates. Before the retreat, participants were asked to complete both the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQi). Both of these assessments were used throughout the retreat workshops to gain a better understanding of our own personalities, our strengths and weaknesses, and how we can use these traits in our interactions with other people.

With his engaging and entertaining disposition, Hile maintained a high level of interaction with the audience and held our attention throughout the sessions. The feedback received from these personality workshops was very supportive, with positive comments for both the content and Hile's delivery of the subjects. We thank Hile for attending our retreat and for making it a fun and interactive experience.

The retreat also featured science talks by 14 GPP students from various partnerships, individual and international agreements. Several universities and institutes were represented for these talks, which ranged from basic science investigations of protein interactions to a genetic analysis of the Alaskan Sled Dog.

Participants of the retreat also helped make our first GPP Talent Showcase an entertaining hit. The audience was treated to the comedic talents of OITE director Sharon Milgram's "Top 10 ways you know you're an NIH grad student," the musical stylings of Allison Burrell, a fantastically funny music video by Vania Cao, an African and a Bangladeshi song by Zulfiquer Hossain, an Indian Dance by Pavitra Kannan, a funny song by GSC representatives (Kate Callahan, Kim Baxter, Tom Johnson, Stephanie Guzik, and several audience members that participated), and a MadLibs story by OITE staff members Lori Conlan and Betsey Wagener. Feedback from the Talent Showcase was overwhelmingly positive, with calls for another

showcase at next year's retreat and with several audience members debating what they could perform next year.

This year's retreat closed with a few hours of free time to enjoy the beautiful area surrounding the resort, including a lake for boating and several jogging trails. Unfortunately, a brief bout of heavy rain dampened the free time, but the retreat community's disposition couldn't be spoiled. Thank you to all of the students and staff members who participated this year, we look forward to seeing you and some new faces next year!

Science Policy Headlines

July 8, 2009: President Obama nominates Francis Collins as NIH director

- Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D., directed the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) from 1993 until 2008, during which time he oversaw the Human Genome Project (HGP), as well as several other whole genome sequencing initiatives. Noted for his discoveries of genes associated with numerous human diseases, he now champions the implementation of genomics-based personalized medicine in the clinic.
- One of only a handful of well-known scientists that speak openly about religious beliefs, Collins is the founder and president of the BioLogos Foundation, which is committed to "promoting a perspective of the origins of life that is both theologically and scientifically sound," according to the foundation's website. In 2006, Dr. Collins published *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*, a *New York Times* bestseller that stirred controversy among scientists like Richard Dawkins, who questioned the scientist's ability to simultaneously maintain scientific integrity and a Christian belief system.
- While the response to Collins' nomination is overwhelmingly positive, some worry that the scientist's emphasis on translational, as opposed to basic research, might alter future funding opportunities.
- Read more at about Dr. Collins at: <http://www.genome.gov/10000779> and http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/President-Obama-Announces-Intent-to-Nominate-Francis-Collins-as-NIH-Director/.

GSC Meeting Overview: 07/13/09

GPP Notes:

- August 3rd GSC meeting will be held in the

Graduate Student Lounge in Building 10, from 4-5pm.

- GPP barbecue will be held August 5th at lunchtime; food will be provided.

Social Committee:

- Looking for a new Social Committee member.
- Recruiting volunteers to organize a Halloween Party.

Academic Committee:

- Looking for grad students to give lectures during the fall FAES course.
- Systems Neuroscience Interest Group now led by Anke Karabanov.

Career Development:

- Recruiting volunteers for the committee. Contact Shau-Ming Wei.

Community Service:

- August Manna packing night planned.

Public Relations Committee:

- Planning on phasing out GSX and posting information on the GSC website and a GSC Google Calendar instead.

Symposium Committee:

- Save the date: November 10th, 2009.

New Business:

- Committee photos.

Tip of the Month:

Naval Medical Center Gym

Sometimes a good workout after sitting at the bench all day is what you need to clear your head, so take advantage of the free Naval Medical Center gym while you still can! Just bring your ID with you and you can use the cardio equipment, weight room, showers and swimming pool, all located conveniently across the street from the NIH main campus. The gym is reported to be closing down in September, so get your gym time in before your chance is gone! Also remember that NIH grad students get a discount on the NIH R&W gym membership.

<http://www.bethesda.med.navy.mil/Visitor/MoraleWelfare/Recreation/index.aspx>

Graduate Student Entertainment

Need help writing your PhD thesis? Just follow this in-depth, thoughtful guide from the Annals of Improbable Research and your thesis is sure to turn out perfectly:

<http://members.bellatlantic.net/~vze3fs8i/air/airphd.html>

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